

Job dissatisfaction and burnout in secondary school teachers: student's disruptive behaviour and conflict management examined

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Over the last few decades there has been an important consensus amongst both scholars and researchers as far as teacher occupational malaise is concerned on the leading role of both students' disruptive behaviour and/or attitudes and teachers' perception of the difficulty in managing conflicts. Few empirical attempts, however, have been aimed at elucidating what determinants -from either of the two fronts- have a greater prominence to this phenomenon. It is, therefore, the purpose of this study -using a sample of 1,386 teachers from Enseñanza Secundaria Obligatoria (Compulsory Secondary Education), to identify what students' disruptive behaviour and/or attitudes as well as what sources of stress derived from conflict management best discriminate between teachers with different levels of job dissatisfaction and burnout. Results allow us to conclude that all variables validly discriminate as a function of dissatisfaction and burnout. Specifically, aspects such as dealing with the parents of disruptive students and students' problematic behaviour (vandalism within the premises of the school, aggressions among students, verbal abuse and challenging behaviour against the teacher) have an incidence on all three facets of burnout.

Key words: Job dissatisfaction, burnout, secondary education teachers.

Insatisfacción laboral y burnout en profesores de secundaria: las conductas y/o actitudes problemáticas de los estudiantes y el manejo del conflicto a examen. En las últimas décadas existe un importante consenso, entre teóricos e investigadores, acerca del protagonismo, que tanto las conductas y/o actitudes problemáticas de los alumnos, como la percepción del docente, de la dificultad para manejar los conflictos, tienen en el malestar laboral de los profesores. No obstante, existen muy pocos esfuerzos empíricos encaminados a clarificar cuáles son los determinantes que, desde estos dos frentes, adquieren un mayor protagonismo en este fenómeno. Así, el propósito de esta investigación es, a partir de una muestra de 1.386 profesores de Enseñanza Secundaria Obligatoria, identificar qué conductas y/o actitudes problemáticas de los alumnos y qué fuentes de tensión derivadas del manejo de conflictos, diferencian mejor entre docentes con distintos niveles de insatisfacción laboral y burnout. Los resultados permiten concluir que todas las variables diferencian válidamente en función de la insatisfacción y el burnout. En particular, aspectos tales como el tratar con padres de alumnos conflictivos o las conductas-problema de los alumnos (vandalismo en las instalaciones del centro, agresiones entre los alumnos, agresiones verbales y actitudes desafiantes hacia el docente) inciden en las tres facetas del burnout.

Palabras clave: Insatisfacción laboral, burnout, profesores secundaria.

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The phenomenon of school violence has currently become one of the social problems attracting the greatest interest and debate among the different parties involved in education (parents, teachers, politicians, lawmakers...). Scholars and researchers in the field -well aware of these new sensitivities- have addressed their efforts at strengthening the theoretical and empirical *corpus*, which has eventually contributed to clarifying the borders and epicentres of this worrying problem. The need -felt and shared by both the academic and the social domains- to identify the preventive and intervention foundations which effectively have bearing on school violence, is one of the main challenges ahead of us.

Amongst the different parties involved in the educational task, teachers are - as it can be gleaned from the literature (Kyriacou, 2003; Travers and Cooper, 1997)- amongst of the most 'severely affected' by disruptive behaviour in adolescents. Indeed, job dissatisfaction and burnout, which are unfortunately characteristic of some teachers (Otero-López, Santiago and Castro, 2008), have too often their origin in students' disruptive behaviour (Otero-López *et al.*, 2006; Vandenberghe and Huberman, 1999). Certainly, and although in the teaching profession (particularly at the secondary school level) there are also 'other' triggering factors of occupational malaise (e.g., lack of student motivation, changes to curricular contents, the growing number of teacher's responsibilities, excessive bureaucratization), many researchers (Borg and Riding, 1991; Galand, Lecocq and Philippot, 2007; Geving, 2007; Kokkinos, 2007; Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978; Otero-López *et al.*, 2008; Travers and Cooper, 1993) place student disruptive behaviour and/or the teacher's perceived difficulty in conflict management (inside and outside the classroom) at the heart of teacher occupational malaise (whether under the rubric of job dissatisfaction or burnout). In sum, we concur with Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) when they point out that stressing factors reasonably account for job dissatisfaction and burnout (seen within the three-dimensional conceptualisation of the syndrome: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and personal accomplishment) in any professional group working in direct contact with people (teachers, in this regard, are no exception).

Beyond the analysis of the categories of stressors and, mainly due to the manifestation of 'new' behaviours and/or attitudes by students as well as the difficulties faced by teachers in successfully dealing with conflicts arising from these casuists, research suggests that it is necessary to elucidate which source(s) has/have the most prominent role in the growing teachers' malaise. In other words, and with the *status quo* of this field of study in mind, the urgency would not so much be the design of new taxonomies of stressors -there are excellent proposals in this regard (see, for instance, Esteve, Franco and Vera, 1995; Travers and Cooper, 1997)-, as to respond to a 'need of the field': identifying 'what' or 'which' stressors are specifically associated to the phenomena under study. Particularly relevant within this line of argumentation

are the remarks by Geving (2007): “...much past research has tended to focus on describing the general correlates of teacher stress rather than illuminating the specific student behaviours that influence teacher stress” (p. 624).

In short, and taking the above considerations into account, this study seeks to identify which students’ disruptive behaviour and/or attitudes and which sources of stress arising from conflict management best ‘discriminate’ among the different levels of self-reported dissatisfaction and burnout in secondary education teachers. The analysis of the different facets of burnout in the light of the determinants mentioned will be also among the objectives of the study.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 1,386 Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) teachers were recruited for the study. This is a representative sample of the Autonomous Community of Galicia and it is distributed according to typology of school (IES and CPI), environment (urban, coastal rural, and interior rural) and gender (for further details see Otero-López *et al.*, 2006). As to the respondents’ characteristics, the following should be noted: 823 are female teachers (59.4%) and 563 male teachers (40.6%), the range of age is between 26 and 65 years, their mean age being 38.6 years. Seniority in the profession is between 3 and 32 years (Md= 16.9 years), and 35.8% teach in the first cycle of ESO while 64.2% teach in the second cycle.

Instruments

Teachers completed a battery of self-reports which, among other aspects, evaluated the variables analysed in this study: job dissatisfaction, burnout and sources of stress.

Job dissatisfaction was assessed using an 11-item scale designed by Reig and Caruana (1990). The summation of responses to the different items of the self-report yields an overall score indicating the level of teacher job dissatisfaction. Internal consistence (Cronbach’s α) of this instrument has been 0.88. Confirmatory factorial analysis made on the sample from our study (method of main components and varimax rotation) show the greater suitability of a structure of a single factor (49% of variance explained), when saturating all the items in this dimension (factorial weights oscillate between 0.41 and 0.86). So as to validly respond to the objectives of this study, three groups were created, the criterion being the self-reported level of job dissatisfaction reported by teachers (low: scores equal to or below 25 percentiles, moderate: scores between 25 and 75 percentiles, high: scores of 75 percentiles or higher).

The *Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey* (MBI-ES), developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986), was used to evaluate the burnout syndrome. This questionnaire, a landmark in this field of study, consists of 22 items relating to the frequency teachers experience certain feelings, thoughts and attitudes towards their work and their students. Specifically, this instrument not only allows us to obtain a score for each dimension (emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and personal accomplishment), but also an overall score for burnout. In this study, and in keeping with the objectives set, both a global score and one corresponding to each of the dimensions have been used. As to the psychometric properties of MBI-ES, internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha coefficient) for the different facets is between 0.71 and 0.90. In accordance with the objectives of this study, and like in the case of job dissatisfaction, different groups have been established as a function of the level of burnout and dimensions (cutting points coincide with those advanced above).

The Inventory of Occupational Stressors for Secondary School Teachers (Otero-López *et al.*, 2006) was used to evaluate 'students' disruptive behaviour and/or attitudes' and 'conflict management'. An explanatory factorial analysis (main components, varimax rotation) was conducted which yielded 10 factors that group 66 items and account for 51.9% of the variance (the internal consistence indexes, calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranged between 0.78 and 0.91). The two first factors called 'Students' disruptive behaviour and disciplinary issues' (31.28% of variance explained, alpha 0.89) and 'Competence/Teachers' perceived assurance' (4.63% variance explained, alpha 0.80) were the source for the choice of the items that make up the scales used in this study. Upon the principle of parsimony, the items that on the opinion of both other teachers and the research team satisfactorily represented 'students' disruptive behaviour and/or attitudes' and 'conflict management' were selected. They all were evaluated in accordance with the degree of distress they generated on the teacher (Likert-type scale: 0 'it causes me no distress' up to 4 'it causes me a lot of distress'). An explanatory factorial analysis confirmed the unidimensionality of each of the scales. The first one, '*Students' disruptive behaviour and/or attitudes*' ($\alpha=0.88$), includes the following items: 'Verbal abuse on the part of students', 'The increase in aggressions among students', 'Vandalism within the premises of the school', 'The existence of racist attitudes and/or behaviour in the school', 'The students challenging my competence and skills' and 'The students taking a passive attitude in the classroom'; the second, '*Conflict management*' ($\alpha=0.87$), consists of the following items: 'Having to deal with students disciplinary problems', 'Having to meet the parents of disruptive students', 'Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom', 'The fact that students are constantly 'putting you to the test' and 'Not being able to deal with conflicts with students'.

Procedure

This study is part of a wider research project into occupational stress and burnout in ESO teachers. Sample collection was done in the final semester of 2005 and the first term of 2006. The administration of questionnaires was made by both personnel from the research team and by previously trained hired personnel collaborating in field work. The task was sequenced as follows: schools were contacted (the principal and/or the director of studies) and a date for the visit was agreed. Then teachers voluntarily participating in the study were explained the objective of the project and self-reports were give out (anonymity and data confidentiality were guaranteed). Questionnaires were then collected at the schools or, in some cases, posted by teachers.

RESULTS

In this research, in keeping with the initial objectives, a variance analysis has been used to determine what sources of stress establish significant differences as a function of the level of job dissatisfaction and burnout in teachers (first analysis) and for each of the dimensions of the syndrome (second analysis). Furthermore, in the case of those variables that reached statistical relevance in the variance analysis, the Scheffé's *a posteriori* test was conducted in order to clarify between which groups - taken in twos- differences are established.

Table 1. Analysis of the variance in relation to job dissatisfaction

	Low (N=360)	Moderate (N=664)	High (N=362)	F	Scheffé
Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems	2.22	2.75	2.94	72.33***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Having to meet the parents of disruptive students	1.63	2.16	2.58	54.57***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Verbal abuse on the part of students	2.50	2.84	3.16	25.91***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
The increase in aggressions among students	2.66	2.86	3.11	16.68***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom	1.62	2.09	2.69	60.92***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
The fact that students are constantly putting you to the test	1.38	1.96	2.44	59.17***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Vandalism within the premises of the school	2.39	2.55	2.95	20.63***	1/3, 2/3
The existence of racist behaviour and/or attitudes in the school	2.11	2.12	2.14	n.s.	---
The students challenging my competence and skills	1.41	1.66	2.09	24.39***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
The students taking a passive attitude in the classroom	2.44	2.62	2.96	24.37***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Not being able to deal with conflicts with students	1.30	1.70	2.12	39.76***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3

*** $p < .001$

As to *job dissatisfaction*, it is confirmed -as expected and shown in table 1- that almost every stressor (the only exception being 'The existence of racist behaviour

and/or attitudes in the school'), establishes statistically relevant differences between the groups. The most marked differences (F values between 72.33 and 54.57, $p < .001$) occur for the following sources of stress: 'Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems', 'Difficulties in maintaining discipline within the classroom', 'The fact that students are constantly 'putting you to the test'', and 'Having to meet the parents of disruptive students'. Scheffé's *a posteriori* test allows us to conclude that all stressors reaching statistical relevance (except 'Vandalism within the premises of the school') and validly discriminate between all inter-group comparisons; vandalism within the premises of the school discriminates between groups with low-high dissatisfaction (comparison 1/3) and moderate-high dissatisfaction (comparison 2/3). In sum, the resulting pattern shows that the greater is the stress suffered by the teacher -whether derived from behavioural problems and /or negative attitudes of students as that associated to conflict management- the greater is their job dissatisfaction.

As to burnout (see table 2), the prominent role of all the variables included in this study is also confirmed. Indeed, all the sources of stress establish statistically significant differences as a function of burnout level. More specifically, and taking into account F values, the most marked differences are found in items: 'Having to meet the parents of disruptive students', 'Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom', 'Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems', and 'The fact that students are constantly 'putting you to the test'' (F values between 148.05 and 138.61, $p < .001$). It seems, therefore, that distress caused by 'conflict management' is to a great extent what characterises teachers with high levels of burnout; students' disruptive behaviour and/or attitudes prove less discriminating among the different groups.

Table 2. Analysis of the variance in relation to burnout

	Low (N=349)	Moderate (N=665)	High (N=372)	F	Scheffé
Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems	2.20	2.60	3.40	139.26***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Having to meet the parents of disruptive students	1.47	2.03	2.94	148.05***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Verbal abuse on the part of students	2.36	2.74	3.46	81.77***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
The increase in aggressions among students	2.50	2.78	3.38	75.018***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom	1.46	1.99	2.98	144.52***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
The fact that students are constantly putting you to the test	1.25	1.82	2.77	138.61***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Vandalism within the premises of the school	2.18	2.46	3.28	89.64***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
The existence of racist behaviour and/or attitudes in the school	1.93	2.03	2.30	7.33***	1/3, 2/3
The students challenging my competence and skills	1.43	1.57	2.20	36.70***	1/3, 2/3
The students taking a passive attitude in the classroom	2.38	2.57	3.09	49.69***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Not being able to deal with conflicts with students	1.20	1.63	2.30	76.78***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3

*** $p < .001$

A more exhaustive analysis of the findings confirms the following pattern: as the level of burnout increases, the perception of conflict-related distress also increases (e.g., having to deal with students' disciplinary problems, having to meet the

parents of disruptive students) and students' disruptive behaviour (e.g., verbal abuse on the part of students, vandalism within the premises of the school). Almost every stressor discriminates between all groups (comparisons: 1/2, 1/3 and 2/3), the only exceptions being items 'The existence of racist behaviour and/or attitudes in the school' and 'The students challenging my competence and skills', that only establish significant differences between groups 1/3 and 2/3.

Results in relation to the three dimensions of burnout (second objective of the study) are shown in table 3.

Thus, for the *emotional exhaustion* dimension, it is confirmed that all sources of stress establish significant differences between the different groups of teachers. This finding seems to indicate an important association between this facet of burnout and the distress arising from 'students' disruptive behaviour' and 'management of potentially conflictive situations'. Specifically, the most marked differences are found for the following sources of stress: 'Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems', 'Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom', 'Having to meet the parents of disruptive students', and 'The fact that students are constantly 'putting you to the test'' (F values between 120.87 and 105.33, $p < .001$). In any case, the resulting pattern is that teachers with high emotional exhaustion (group 3) report, as opposed to groups 1 and 2 (low and moderate exhaustion), greater distress for each and every source of stress.

A further analysis using Scheffé's *a posteriori* test shows that teachers with high emotional exhaustion report -as opposed to the other groups, and at statistically significant levels- greater distress in almost every stressor (the exception being the item: 'The existence of racist behaviour and/or attitudes in the school'). Significant differences are likewise established -always in the expected orientation- between teachers with moderate and low exhaustion in 9 of the 11 sources of stress (the exceptions being those associated to items: 'The existence of racist behaviour and/or attitudes in the school' and 'The students challenging my competence and skills').

As to the *depersonalisation* dimension, the results of the variance analysis (see table 3) confirm that all sources of stress, except item 'The existence of racist behaviour and/or attitudes in the school', establish statistically significant differences between the groups. These differences have the following pattern: teachers with greater levels of depersonalisation are also -when compared to the other groups- those reporting the highest distress before any type of stressor. More specifically, 'Having to meet the parents of disruptive students', 'The fact that students are constantly 'putting you to the test'', 'Vandalism within the premises of the school', and 'Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom', are the items with greater F values (the range oscillates between 42.71 and 40.12, $p < .001$). Generally speaking, and judging from these findings, it could be said that teachers' attitude of emotional detachment is very

likely to have a negative influence on the assessment of their students' disruptive behaviour and on the teachers' self-perception of conflict management; the hypothesis that it would be precisely those factors which had an incidence on teacher depersonalisation could also be plausible. In any case, both theses -rather than mutually exclusive- may be complementary.

Table 3. Analysis of the variance in relation to burnout's dimensions

	Low	Modera	High	F	Scheffé	
	N=369	N=667	N=340			
Emotional Exhaustion	Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems	2.25	2.62	3.39	120.87***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	Having to meet the parents of disruptive students	1.52	2.11	2.83	105.85***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	Verbal abuse on the part of students	2.33	2.83	3.40	70.01***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	The increase in aggressions among students	2.48	2.86	3.33	62.71***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom	1.41	2.13	2.88	120.36***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	The fact that students are constantly putting you to the test	1.27	1.93	2.65	105.33***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	Vandalism within the premises of the school	2.18	2.52	3.25	76.01***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	The existence of racist behaviour and/or attitudes in the school	1.90	2.11	2.19	4.48**	1/3
	The students challenging my competence and skills	1.42	1.63	2.16	28.83***	1/3, 2/3
	The students taking a passive attitude in the classroom	2.39	2.61	3.06	41.98***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
Not being able to deal with conflicts with students	1.20	1.73	2.20	59.96***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3	
Depersonalisation	N=367	N=680	N=339			
	Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems	2.44	2.65	3.13	39.81***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	Having to meet the parents of disruptive students	1.77	2.08	2.63	42.71***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	Verbal abuse on the part of students	2.62	2.77	3.20	21.41***	1/3, 2/3
	The increase in aggressions among students	2.71	2.84	3.11	13.50***	1/3, 2/3
	Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom	1.77	2.05	2.64	40.12***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	The fact that students are constantly putting you to the test	1.59	1.84	2.48	42.45***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	Vandalism within the premises of the school	2.31	2.53	3.10	41.27***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3
	The existence of racist behaviour and/or attitudes in the school	1.92	2.08	2.24	n.s.	----
	The students challenging my competence and skills	1.50	1.69	1.95	9.79***	1/3, 2/3
The students taking a passive attitude in the classroom	2.48	2.62	2.95	19.64***	1/3, 2/3	
Not being able to deal with conflicts with students	1.45	1.66	2.06	21.95***	1/2, 1/3, 2/3	
Personal Accomplishment	N=345	N=710	N=331			
	Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems	2.94	2.63	2.64	10.69***	1/2, 1/3
	Having to meet the parents of disruptive students	2.45	2.07	1.94	15.41***	1/2, 1/3
	Verbal abuse on the part of students	3.07	2.78	2.70	8.76***	1/2, 1/3
	The increase in aggressions among students	3.06	2.81	2.79	8.44***	1/2, 1/3
	Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom	2.38	2.05	2.01	8.63***	1/2, 1/3
	The fact that students are constantly putting you to the test	2.17	1.85	1.87	6.85***	1/2, 1/3
	Vandalism within the premises of the school	2.81	2.54	2.55	5.75**	1/2, 1/3
	The existence of racist behaviour and/or attitudes in the school	2.13	2.01	2.15	n.s.	----
	The students challenging my competence and skills	1.88	1.62	1.70	4.32**	1/2
The students taking a passive attitude in the classroom	2.83	2.61	2.61	5.71**	1/2, 1/3	
Not being able to deal with conflicts with students	1.92	1.64	1.61	6.69***	1/2, 1/3	

p* < .01 *p* < .001

The results obtained with Scheffé's test for the depersonalisation dimension allow us to show that most stressors (6 out of 10) establish statistically significant differences among all groups. Teachers with high depersonalisation are differentiated at

statistically significant levels from the other two groups (low and moderate) in the remaining items.

Lastly, the analysis of variance and Scheffé's *a posteriori* test for the *personal accomplishment* dimension (see table 3) allows us to evidence that none of the sources of stress establishes significant differences between the groups of moderate and high personal accomplishment. Generally speaking, it is also confirmed that -as expected- the group of teachers reporting low accomplishment is also the one presenting a higher perception of distress in the casuists analysed. The items with a greater discriminating power are the following: 'Having to meet the parents of disruptive students', 'Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems', 'Verbal abuse on the part of students', and 'Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom'. Like in the case of the depersonalization dimension, 'The existence of racist behaviour and/or attitudes in the school' does not discriminate between the different groups as a function of personal accomplishment. On the contrary, and looking at which groups do show significant differences, the common pattern as regards 9 of the 11 sources of stress is the following: the teachers who consider themselves less efficient in comparison to those reporting moderate and high accomplishment are also those assessing as more stressing the different disruptive behaviours and conflict management.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained in this investigation, as expected, confirm the suitability of considering students' disruptive behaviour and the perceived difficulty in managing conflict as important 'modulators' of the level of job dissatisfaction and burnout in secondary education teachers. Indeed, the results of this study demonstrate that the different sources of stress derived from both 'students' disruptive behaviour/attitudes', and 'conflict management in the school environment', validly differentiate among groups of teachers with different levels of job dissatisfaction and burnout.

More specifically, different casuists that have to do with the management of potentially conflictive situations (for instance, 'Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems', 'Having to meet the parents of disruptive students', 'Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom', 'The fact that students are constantly 'putting you to the test'') attain an important discriminating power for the levels of job dissatisfaction and burnout. These results are coincident with those in earlier literature (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978; Lewis, Romi, Qui and Katz, 2005; Sari, 2004). Specifically, and by way of example of the empirical findings on the students' disruptive behaviour/teacher malaise binomial, Kyriacou (2003) should be mentioned. According to this writer, the need to be constantly 'alert' to any indication of 'student

disruptive behaviour' as well as having to deal specific instances of dysfunctional behaviour (a case in point is the challenging attitude on the part of students in an attempt to constantly 'put you to the test') satisfactorily explain teacher occupational malaise. Phillips and Lee (1980) also underscore, in this regard that *'When teachers are asked to describe their fears, apprehensions and concerns related to teaching, student discipline usually heads the list'* (p. 98). Not least relevant, judging from the findings in this study, is the relationship between teachers and the parents of disruptive students. Although there is less empirical evidence in this regard in the literature, it is not less true that many writers (see, for instance, Gaziel, 1993; McCormick, 1997) point out that the teacher-parents 'disagreement' as regards the 'perceived seriousness' of disruptive behaviour in adolescents has a direct incidence on teacher malaise.

As to the dimensional analysis of burnout (second objective of this study), the results obtained confirm the suitability of 'students' disruptive behaviour and/or attitudes' and 'conflict management' as important empirical arguments associated to the severity of each of the facets of the syndrome; this finding is again supported by previous research (Beer and Beer, 1992; Capel, 1987).

Another interesting result has to do with the fact that the different indicators of the 'students' disruptive behaviour' and 'the difficulty in dealing with conflicts perceived by teachers' establish the main inter-group differences for the dimension of emotional exhaustion. This is an expected result since -as Maslach *et al.* (2001) indicate- exhaustion is at the heart of this syndrome. In our study, the items with 'greater discriminating' power for emotional exhaustion are those having to do with disciplinary issues (for instance, 'Having to deal with students' disciplinary problems' and 'Difficulties in maintaining discipline in the classroom'). This finding clearly agrees with those obtained by Caspari (1976), who concludes that the exhaustion experienced by teachers to a great extent originates in the demands posed by maintaining discipline.

Another stressor that emerges with an unexpected strength in the results of this study -particularly as regards the dimensions of depersonalisation and personal accomplishment- is 'Having to meet the parents of disruptive students'. This interaction seems to be directly associated with the detrimental effect on the teacher's perception of effectiveness (probably due to the failed or little successful attempts at demanding a greater and better collaboration between both educational agents) and with a greater depersonalisation. In any case, it seems both necessary and healthy that a compromise is reached between teachers and parents as regards the attitudes, perceptions and motivations with a view to efficiently solving adolescent disruptive behaviour. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) note, in this regard, that interacting with parents is experienced by the teacher -more than any other aspect of their work- as the most 'anxious mood inducing' experience.

A final, interesting note has to do with the fact that students' disruptive behaviour (vandalism with the premises of the school, verbal abuse and challenging attitudes towards the teacher) are consolidating -according to the findings- as relevant variables for emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and diminished sense of professional competence. Our findings confirm the evidence documented by a wide body of empirical works analysing the perception of aggression in the classroom (see, for instance, Lawrence and Green, 2005) or the differential effect of the disciplinary styles (e.g., Lewis, Romi, Qui and Katz, 2005).

In reporting the main conclusions for the different dimensions of burnout the following should be underscored: 1) regardless of the type of stressor considered the main differences are found in emotional exhaustion, 2) generally speaking, both those teachers who feel more emotionally exhausted by their work and those who adopt an attitude of greater psychological detachment in their relationship with the others (parents, students), and even those making a more negative assessment of their academic accomplishment, are, generally speaking, those who perceive the disruptive behaviour of their students as more stressing and have greater difficulty in managing conflict, 3) the teacher-parents interaction in the case of disruptive students emerges as a particularly important variable in depersonalisation and the perception teachers have of personal accomplishment and 4) some specific behaviours that are considered deviant (vandalism and aggressions) establish important differences in the three dimensions of burnout.

In sum, from the results obtained in this study, it is apparent that students' disruptive behaviour and/or attitudes and the difficulties encountered by teachers in managing conflict must be considered necessary ingredients in order to gain a more comprehensive approach of occupational malaise (dissatisfaction, burnout) experienced by secondary education teachers.

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